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Comments of Bob Hoffman

President, Pacific-Northwest Newspaper Guild, CWA Local 37082
Before FCC Field Hearing on Broadcast Ownership Rules
Seattle, WA
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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

Good morning. I'm Bob Hoffman, president of the Pacific-Northwest Newspaper Guild, the union that represents more than 1,000 journalists, ad sales and customer service workers at newspapers throughout Puget Sound. I would first like to thank the commissioners for allowing the citizens of Washington State the opportunity to weigh in on this important rulemaking.

Freedom of the press and broad public access to diverse viewpoints from antagonistic information sources are prerequisites for a functioning democracy. That's why my union and other area AFL-CIO locals represented by the King County Labor Council have passed a resolution calling upon the FCC to serve the public interest and the citizens of Seattle by retaining and strengthening media ownership regulations. I will include a copy of our resolution for the record.

In the Seattle area, there are two major daily newspapers: *The Seattle Times*, jointly owned by the Blethen family and Knight-Ridder, and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, owned by the Hearst Corporation. These papers operate under a Joint Operating Agreement, which I will discuss in my remarks.

Also in this area, there are six over-the-air TV stations with local news shows, which include four major network affiliated stations and two smaller stations with modified newscasts produced by the NBC and CBS affiliate newsrooms. These six stations belong to five different owners. Together, they have 90% of the overall TV market. The top four radio station owners control 85% of the radio market, compared to 61% market share in 1996 when the Telecommunications Act lifted all national radio ownership limits.

Other media markets are not so lucky. Most U.S. cities have only one daily newspaper, and 70 percent of the 210 U.S. television markets have four or fewer stations that carry original local news programming.

In light of these figures, we are concerned that the elimination or weakening of these ownership regulations will reduce competition, localism and diversity here in Seattle and thus reduce the quality and quantity of news that diverse media ownership in this community has fostered.

For example, Seattle's two competing daily newspapers do in fact compete on a daily basis to the benefit of our state. A recent well-known story—of relevance to this venue—was an exclusive discovery made by the Seattle P-I three weeks ago. Our highest paid state employee, University of Washington football coach Rick Neuheisel, lied to the media and the public when he said his visit to the Bay area was not to interview for the

head coaching vacancy with the San Francisco 49ers. But, when P-I columnist John Levesque presented irrefutable evidence to the contrary, the coach confessed that he was following a confidentiality agreement, had been dishonest, and was remorseful. The days following saw nothing less than a public debate on the importance of truthfulness and credibility for Coach Neuheisel, and for all of us.

In this case it was the P-I that did the community a service, and I could just as easily give examples of the Times doing the same on an almost daily basis.

But, the reason I cite this example is that it highlights the fact that even though the Seattle Times and Seattle P-I, since 1983, have operated under a joint operating agreement that combines their business operations, they sustained successfully competing newsrooms. The two newsrooms promote higher news quality by creating competition among individual reporters and news staffs.

The FCC should not take any action that will hasten media consolidation. If media combinations are permitted, the Commission should ensure that such combinations are in the public interest and that antagonistic sources of news and information are preserved.

Our parent union, the CWA, has proposed that any media mergers that are permitted carry a requirement that news operations remain separate. The language in the CWA's filing is modeled after the Newspaper Preservation Act, enacted by the will of congress in 1970, which allows certain newspapers to combine business operations but maintain distinct news and editorial staffs.

In Seattle, we have a vibrant activist community—and it's not just the coffee. Those of us who regularly exercise our free speech and assembly rights therefore call upon the Commission to adopt rules that protect Seattle's media market from consolidation in a few corporate hands. Such a consolidation would do serious harm to the "marketplace of ideas" that is essential to our democracy, both here in the Puget Sound and throughout the country.

Quoting from a decision of the Washington State Supreme Court, "free speech is a fundamental right enabling us to preserve all other rights," and "a free press is certainly an essential and crucial ingredient of a democratic society." •

Thank you.

**Nelson vs. McClatchy Newspapers, Id. at 536.*

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF DIVERSITY IN MEDIA OWNERSHIP

**ADOPTED BY THE KING COUNTY LABOR COUNCIL, AFL-CIO
FEBRUARY 19, 2003**

WHEREAS freedom of the press and broad public access to a diverse range of information through the media are prerequisites for a functioning democracy; they are the very oxygen of democracy; and the broadcast airwaves and the internet are owned commonly by the public and should be managed to serve the public interest; and

WHEREAS adherence to the highest journalistic principles is a public trust; and the public interest is best served by the availability of a broadly diverse range of viewpoints; and media diversity and employment is seriously threatened by further consolidation of media ownership in the hands of fewer entities; and

WHEREAS the Federal Communications Commission is currently considering an unprecedented rollback of media ownership regulations which protect diversity and local accountability in our media; and the elimination or weakening of these regulations would likely reduce competition, local accountability, diversity of content, diversity of voices, and the amount and/or quality of news coverage in broadcast and print media across the country, while providing windfall profits for a small handful of corporate media owners; and

WHEREAS we recognize that citizens in a democracy require public access to a diverse range of media voices and messages in order to participate fully in our community's shared social, cultural and political life; therefore be it

RESOLVED that we call upon the Federal Communications Commission and the Congress to protect content diversity and press freedom by retaining and strengthening existing media ownership regulations and we further call upon the Congress to exercise its oversight in the area of federal communications policy and to consider legislation aimed at protecting our democratic media by prohibiting further media consolidation.